

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Rabbit Valley Working Group
October 15, 2002

Attendees:

Bob Silbernagel	N. J. Fulmer	Jane Ross
Nadja Brozina	Mel Lloyd	Lovell Sasser
Kathy Click	Neal McKinstry	Charlie Sweet
Mike Click	Jack Placchi	Paul Toft
Jim Cooper	John Potter	

Greetings and Introductions

John Potter opened the meeting at 5:55 p.m. John inquired about a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) map reflecting the areas best suited for rehabilitation per the BLM presentations made at the last Working Group meeting. Jane Ross, Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) Planning and Environmental Coordinator, indicated that she did not have the map but would ask Lynae Rogers, BLM Rangeland Management Specialist, to generate the map for distribution to the group.

Working Group Discussions

John focused group discussions on the future of the East Rim Trail. John feels that, as one of the most popular trails in the area, the trail should be kept open and improved. Jim Cooper, BLM Transportation Planner, suggested moving the trail given the intense use the trail receives. Jim indicated that he is looking for a rim or ledge, out of the valley, that can withstand heavier traffic. The existing route could be "hardened," but it would be much better to relocate the trail altogether. Hardening a trail, Jim explained, involves removing the existing trail base, installing a stabilizing system (pavers, bricks, etc.) that will "hold" dirt in place, and then infilling the apparatus with sand and/or dirt. Jim invited others to join him on Friday to ride the trail for further evaluation.

A small section (about 200 yards) of private land, owned by several individuals from the Vail area, would be ideal for a reroute. Bob Silbernagel added that extensive bushwhacking and off-trail riding has been occurring in the area. Jim emphasized that a smarter trail system, along with education, would help in alleviating the intense pressure on the current trail systems.

Jane asked about the status of the old trail, if a new one was built. The old trail would possibly be closed. N. J. Fulmer voiced a concern about the number of new trails that have been proposed; yet it appears that none are being closed. N. J. had not been present at recent meetings, so John explained the trail issues that had been previously discussed, as well as compromises reached, by the group.

Paul Toft, as a representative for the all-terrain vehicle (ATV) community, expressed his discontent with N. J.'s view toward closing trails. It was explained to N. J. that the current trail system is a compromise that still allows ATV use. N. J. thought that the reasons for the Working Group's existence was because too many trails and too much damage had been inflicted upon the land, and it was the group's objective to reverse this.

Jim reminded everyone that the actual reason the group is here is a result of the *Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area and Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Act of 2000* that was signed into law by the President. N. J. pointed out that, at the group's first meeting, the issues related to intense use, and the impact incurred by that use, were discussed. Jim updated N. J. on the Land Health Assessment and grazing presentations made by Harley Metz, BLM Ecologist, and Lynae, at the September 23 meeting, in which Harley reported that most of Rabbit Valley remains classified as meeting land health standards.

Jane asked Paul to take the current map with him to his ATV club meeting this week and also reminded Paul that the Rabbit Valley proposed trail system is not an "all or nothing" proposition. While the ATV community may be against trail closures, John asked Paul to remind the club about the number of proposed new trails. Jane asked the Working Group to step away from the issues of damage and trail density, and focus on the "smart trail system" that BLM intends to design.

Jane also reminded the group of the four alternatives that can be developed for the resource management plan. Many of these proposals may fall under one of those alternative plans.

Jim suggested that each member communicate to his or her respective user groups that it is essential for any successful trail system to keep the old trails open while the new trails are being constructed. Those old trails can then be evaluated for rehabilitation and potentially closed.

Jane recapped what she thought to be the group's position as she saw it. The East Rim Trail will be kept open, and nothing will get closed until the new trails are opened. Paul offered that the ATV community has tentatively accepted an environmentally sensitive trail plan, but what matters most is that they have trails to ride.

Jane introduced Jack Placchi from the BLM Colorado State Office. Jack is the Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Coordinator, and Jane is pleased that Jack was able to meet the group and offer his insight and expertise.

John returned the group's focus to the East Rim Trail discussions and summarized that he hopes that either the trail surface can be hardened or the trail rerouted.

River access was then addressed, and Jim declared that he spent several hours and could not find a safe, acceptable route down to the river via the east route illustrated on

the Rabbit Valley alternatives map. The railroad easement presents an access problem, but John feels that one particular area has potential if crossing the rail itself can be avoided.

Jim said that he would continue to explore options for the East Rim Trail; the previously proposed river access is non-existent. Bob proposed that this access be struck from the map, and no one disagreed. The group will instead focus on the second proposed river access further to the west.

Practical trail routes were discussed extensively, with private-parcel routes proposed as alternatives. Jane summarized the group's conclusions in that the East Rim Trail should be kept because of its popularity and potential, and its uses will remain for hiking and horseback riding. Jane reminded the group that there is a right way to build trails, and conservation is critical—after all, it is a National *Conservation* Area. The group also concluded that Wild Horse Mesa will not encourage horseback riders, but both hiking and horseback riding will be allowed, with signage indicating hiking only. Jack suggested that in this particular situation, it is best to be specific with signage about what uses are, and are not, allowed.

Charlie Sweet pointed out that to deny access to any one user group would only cause problems down the road. Rather, the better solution is to encourage specific users through signing.

Jane asked the group to address the future management of the Utah Rims area. John thought that, from previous discussions, BLM Moab did not necessarily favor any kind of a cooperative agreement with BLM Grand Junction for management of this area just inside the Utah state line. Jane encouraged the group to provide for, in its recommendations to the Advisory Council, the BLM Grand Junction field office assuming management of the area. Others in the group felt that the Working Group had no power to sway BLM Moab's position on this matter. Paul reminded the group that, given the popularity of the area immediately surrounding Moab, the Moab BLM office cannot dedicate resources to Utah Rims.

Jack announced his intentions to meet with his Utah counterpart and hopes to build a cooperative working relationship between the two. Jane disagreed with others' less positive perception of a productive working relationship with BLM Moab. Jane maintained that the potential for a cooperative working relationship does exist.

Jim hopes that, by taking the pressure off the immediate Moab area, that BLM office would be willing to cooperate in a joint effort for better managing the Utah Rims area.

Jane clarified BLM Grand Junction's position in that it is not asking for Utah Rims to be a part of the NCA; only that its management be consistent with that of the NCA located within the state of Colorado. BLM Grand Junction feels the best way to accomplish this is through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with BLM Moab that would authorize BLM Grand Junction to manage the area between the state line and

Westwater road. Jack stated that he will further explore this proposal at his upcoming meeting.

Charlie pointed out that Rabbit Valley would only see increased use as a staging area for people headed for Utah Rims, and this proposal makes sense.

Jane asked if anyone needed clarification on any of the discussion items addressed throughout the Working Group meetings. N. J. asked what would happen if the East Rim Trail is relocated, and Jim confirmed that the old trail would be rehabilitated. Jack supports Jim's efforts as the BLM Transportation Planner, in that his continued presence in the field will only aid in the public's acceptance of new trail systems and their monitoring and maintenance issues.

Lovell Sasser reported that the North American Trail Riders Association has grant money available, and to her knowledge, no one is using it. Jack confirmed that BLM has historically not taken advantage of grant monies available.

Jane noted that Jim is working hard to get funds in place so that implementation of the CCNCA RMP management prescriptions can begin quickly once the Resource Management Plan (RMP) is finalized. Grants will be critical to the CCNCA's future.

Jim pointed out the play area reflected on the map. This area, consisting of about 12 acres, has been severely impacted. The BLM is proposing a beginners and children's skills training area, with a 100 cc limit. Jim is submitting a grant application that he hopes will fund this project. The actual project site is 3 acres, and the remaining 9 acres are to be rehabilitated.

Jane recommended that the group meet in early November to wrap up discussions and review the final recommendations for consistency and accuracy, prior to the document's submittal to the Advisory Council. No more meetings are scheduled until that time, and a facilitated meeting is scheduled for November 18, at 5:45 p.m., in the BLM office conference room.

Jane encouraged Paul, and Mike and Kathy Click, to get feedback from their respective user communities on the proposed trail systems for Rabbit Valley.

John adjourned the meeting at 7:15 p.m.